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OME THOUGHTS UPON BEAUTY
IN TYPOGRAPHY SUGGESTED
BY THE WORK OF MR. WIL-
LIAM MORRIS AT THE KELM-
SCOTT PRESS.

"Costume," said the late William Blades, "costume, that sure guide of the historian and antiquary, is nowhere more discernible than in literature, not merely in the dress of language and expression, but also in the visible exponents of that dress—writing and printing." It is to certain of these costumes with which the printer has clothed the productions of his press that I would direct the attention of the reader, in the hope that we may find embodied in them such measure of beauty as shall repay us for our trouble.

Perhaps there is nothing on which this glorious and inglorious century of ours more prides itself than the wonderful development which has been given to the "art preservative of all arts" in the effort to fulfil the divine command *lux lumine in tenebris*. And though, as in all such movements, the gains have had their accompanying losses, there remains much of which we are justly entitled to be proud, and any criticism which we may feel called upon to make will carry the more weight if we show ourselves not wholly oblivious to what has been accomplished. Looking upon the present condition of the art, therefore, as is suitable in such a paper as this, from the purely æsthetic standpoint; judging it solely by the outward appearance, and unconcerned for the present with the worthiness or worthlessness of the ideas which seek dissemination through its medium, we must, I think, agree that its chief blemish is in the failure to so combine beauty with utility as to form an harmonious whole. The effort to accomplish this end is, indeed, constantly being made, for man will always seek to add to the produce of his labour those qualities which testify that it has been a source of joy to its maker, as it should be to its user also. But in these latter days when, as Emerson says,

*" Things are in the saddle,
And ride mankind,"*

and we have still to learn the lesson of the redemption of humanity, the conditions of beauty are largely absent, and most of the attempts to simulate those qualities end in failure, as is abundantly testified by numbers of pretentious vol-

umes of the "*édition de luxe*" class. Editions for the luxurious no doubt they are, helping to raise ever higher and higher the wall of separation behind which an increasing class strive to take their ease while thanking God that they are not as other men are. Badges of class distinction; but not works of art: costly monuments of misdirected ingenuity which will astonish the emancipated man of the future, should, perchance, any of them manage, despite the wretched materials of which they are composed, to survive, in decrepit old age, for him to compare with the works of the early printers, which will then, no less than at present, retain all their pristine glory.

It would be an interesting preliminary, no doubt, to trace the gradual evolution of the art of writing from the time of the formation of the alphabet to the days when the scribes and copyists of books formed strong guilds in every important city, and thence to follow through the works of the early printers all the modifications of the characters under the pressure of varying customs and circumstances. But, interesting though such a *résumé* would be, it would occupy too much of our space, and it seems best to confine ourselves to the consideration of work done with that form of the alphabet known as the Roman, which has, throughout most of the world, been finally triumphant over all others.

The nature of the art of printing to which the name "typography" bears witness should never be forgotten; for if we at all times bear in mind that it is merely a method of *writing*, by means of types, in a less costly and more expeditious way than by the pen, we shall have not only a clue to its true principles, but a means of understanding the varying practices which prevailed amongst those who, though they all obtained their knowledge of it in Germany, practiced their new craft in widely separated localities. When the early printer began to produce books by his new method he simply followed as closely as possible the appearance of manuscript volumes which he multiplied, and the types which he cut were copies of the ordinary handwriting of the scribes and copyists whose work had previously supplied the same market. Thus, north of the Alps the Gothic, or black letter, was the more prevalent and was therefore followed; while in Italy the Roman character was in general use and exerted a controlling influence. The prevalence of this custom is presupposed by the stories that the italic type, first introduced by Aldus, was copied from the manuscript of Petrarch, and that the famous Greek type of the same press was based upon the

Coriolanus Cepio Clarissimo uiro Marco Antonio Mauroceno equiti apud illustrissimū ducem Burgundie Venetorū oratori felicitatem.

Quom prefectus triremis ad classem proficiscerer, quam felicissimus imperator Venetorū Petrus Mocenicus contra Othomanum Turcorū principē ducebar: uehementer rogasti me, ut quicquid in hac expeditione gestum esset litteris mandarem: affirmans ea te Apollinis oraculo uetiora habiturum quē a me scripta forent. Igitur ut tibi morē gererem, quē ab imperatore Mocenico per quadriennium gesta sunt annotaui: Tanto enim tempore & ille imperium gessit, & ego prefectura functus sum. Quapropter opusculū in quo hęc scripta sunt tibi mitto: quod quī perlegeris, nō minus te egregias imperatoris uirtutes quā magnifica ipsius gesta admiraturus certū habeo: meritoque damnabis eorū sententiā qui affirmare solent effectam esse naturam: nec producere tales uiros quales prius temporibus extiterūt: omniaque mundo senescente degenerasse: quā falsi sunt uel ex hoc maxime apparet. Nam si

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hand of Marcus Musurus, the proof-reader. When once we see how the early printers availed themselves of models which were the result of the age-long perfecting labours of monastic and professional scribes, we understand how it was that the new art was enabled to attain results, during the first half century of its existence, which have never since been surpassed.

The earliest Italian printers, while endeavoring to exactly copy the appearance of the manuscripts of the country in which they had settled themselves, were unable to wholly throw off the influence of their German training, and in their Roman types more or less of the Gothic angularity remains to mar the beauty of their work. But a distinct epoch is marked by the advent of Nicholas Jenson among the Venetian printers, because it was to be his fortune to cut, in the year 1470, a fount of type which should remain the standard by which the æsthetic qualities of all subsequent efforts would be judged. Such modifications as have since been

**En hic ille est de illis maxime: qui irridere: atq; obiurgare
me solitus est: quod me non tecum (præsertim cum abs te
honorificentissime iutarer) cōiungererē. ἀλλέ μὲν ὀνόπο
τεθνυμὸν ἐνὶ σήμεσιν ἔπειθεν audiebā enī pceres clamitātis.
Sed tamē idem me cōsolatur etiam hominē perustum :
& inanem : gloria uolunt incendere atq; ita loquuntur .**

Cicero, *Epistolæ Familiares*, Jenson, 1471. (After Brown.)

made in the forms which he then gave to the letters of the alphabet have been mostly for the worse, and introduced by that desire for economy which, unsatisfied with the enormous gains already achieved, must needs sacrifice even Beauty herself upon the altar of Cheapness. As the demand for cheap books increased, the exquisite forms of these early Roman characters underwent two modifications detrimental to their beauty: the loops of the letters were made oval instead of round, and the ascending and descending strokes were allowed to encroach upon the loops themselves. By this means a very considerable economy of space, and so of cost, was obtained, though at the expense of inflicting an injurious tradition upon type-founders which has endured, often in greatly exaggerated forms, to this day, despite the fact that all real excuse for the practice has long ceased to exist. But Nicholas Jenson and John of Speyer always

firmly refused to debase their Roman type, and when at last the former found it necessary to yield to the demand for cheaper books, he sought, as became a craftsman of his ability, to obtain an even greater economy in another and less objectionable way. He cut, and in 1474 began to print from, a new fount of black letter which retained all those features of rugged beauty which are its own characteristics, while fully fifty per cent. more economical of space than his Roman type. To modern eyes, influenced by the inherited training of generations, this may seem a backward step; but it seems also to attest the importance attached by these early masters to the form of the letters they were so loth to alter or debase. It would have been well for the art if their successors had been like them in this respect. But, unfortunately, the evil tradition once introduced prospered more and more, and things went from bad to worse, until the foremost of American printers, Theodore L. DeVinne, writing of the types of to-day, is forced to admit that, while they are painfully correct and precise in form, they are difficult to read and present all the weaknesses of an overwrought delicacy. The veteran English publisher, Mr. C. Kegan Paul, writing upon "The Production and Life of Books" in 1883, complained that "while a modern press can turn out a vast number of volumes with great credit, scarce any book nowadays can vie in beauty" with the books of the old printers, and this largely for the reason that "our types are not so beautiful." He further remarked upon the fact, already pointed out, that "in the old days each type-founder was desirous of getting designs for his letters from men of real artistic feeling; nor did these disdain to design a comma any more than they would scorn to make a beautiful leaf or flower in a picture devoted to saints or historical personages."

The unity of all art, which can only spring from the wholeness and wholesomeness of life, the lesson which our age is slowly realizing that it must relearn, is manifest no less in the dependence of the "lesser" upon the "greater" arts than in the dependence of the greater upon the less; and it was doubtless an appreciation of this fact which led Mr. Kegan Paul to express the opinion, in the article already referred to, that there could "scarcely be a better thing for the artistic future of books than that which might be done by some master of decorative art, like Mr. William Morris, and some great firm of type-founders in conjunction, would they design and produce some new types for our choicest printed books": an opinion which has received abundant confirma-

Echoes of
Love's house

Ah! I praise thee, Love, for utter joyance won!
"And is my praise nought worth for all my life
undone?"

The Bur-
ghers' Battle.

THE BURGHERS' BATTLE.



HICK rise the spear-
shafts o'er the land
That erst the harvest
bore;
The sword is heavy in
the hand,
**And we return no
more.**
The light wind waves
the Ruddy Fox,

Our banner of the war,
And ripples in the Running Ox,

And we return no more.

Across our stubble acres now
The teams go four and four;
But out-worn elders guide the plough,

And we return no more.

And now the women heavy-eyed
Turn through the open door
From gazing down the highway wide,

Where we return no more.

The shadows of the fruited close
Dapple the feast-hall floor;
There lie our dogs and dream and doze,

And we return no more.

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tion in the appearance of the books bearing the imprint and device of the "Kelmscott Press" which Mr. Morris has since established.

These books, of which five have already been issued and two more promised, not only do much to remove the reproach under which English printers have so long lain, of having neglected the traditions and methods handed down from the early days of the art; but they show to how high a point beauty of form can be carried at the hands of a man of artistic perceptions, by the employment of the simplest means only. The day on which, as its colophon tells us, the print-

HERE endeth the Glittering Plain, printed by
William Morris at the Kelmscott Press, Up-
per Mall Hammersmith, in the County of
Middlesex: and finished on the 4th day of
April of the year 1891.
Sold by Reeves & Turner 196 Strand London.

ing of the first of them was finished is one which should be written in letters of gold upon the heart of every true bibliophile.

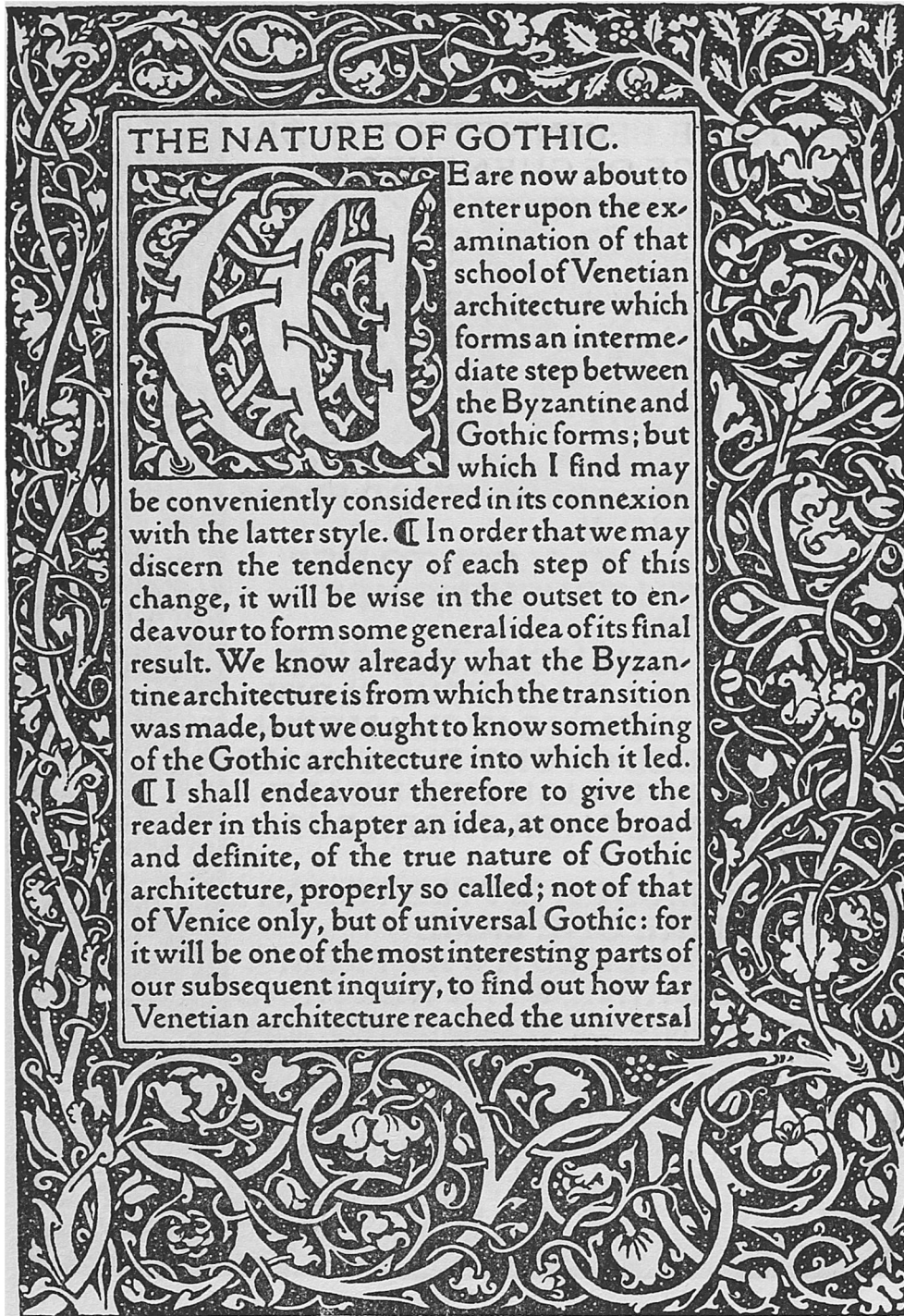
It is difficult merely through description to give any adequate idea of the results which Mr. Morris has attained, and even with the aid of the modern photographic *fac-simile* it will be possible to illustrate only a few of the more superficial qualities of the work, passing over those finer characteristics which are so important to the perfection of the finished book, but which cannot be divorced from their surroundings. It is, nevertheless, a pleasure as well as a duty to chronicle in "a magazine of appreciation" this re-birth of a noble art, which has taken place in our own time; and, unsatisfactory as are the reproductions which are here presented, they will speak far more eloquently than words. Before entering upon an examination of this new type which Mr. Morris has given us, it will be well to again remind ourselves that the entire genius of the artist has only the twenty-six letters, together with the points and numerals, upon which to display itself, and that, too, only within the limits prescribed by the fact that legibility must always be the first consideration.

A comparison of this new type with ordinary "modern-faced" letters, or with those in which this magazine is printed, will show that in it the faults which I have already named have been wholly avoided and that it bears a striking resemblance to the early work. In fact, Mr. Morris has him-

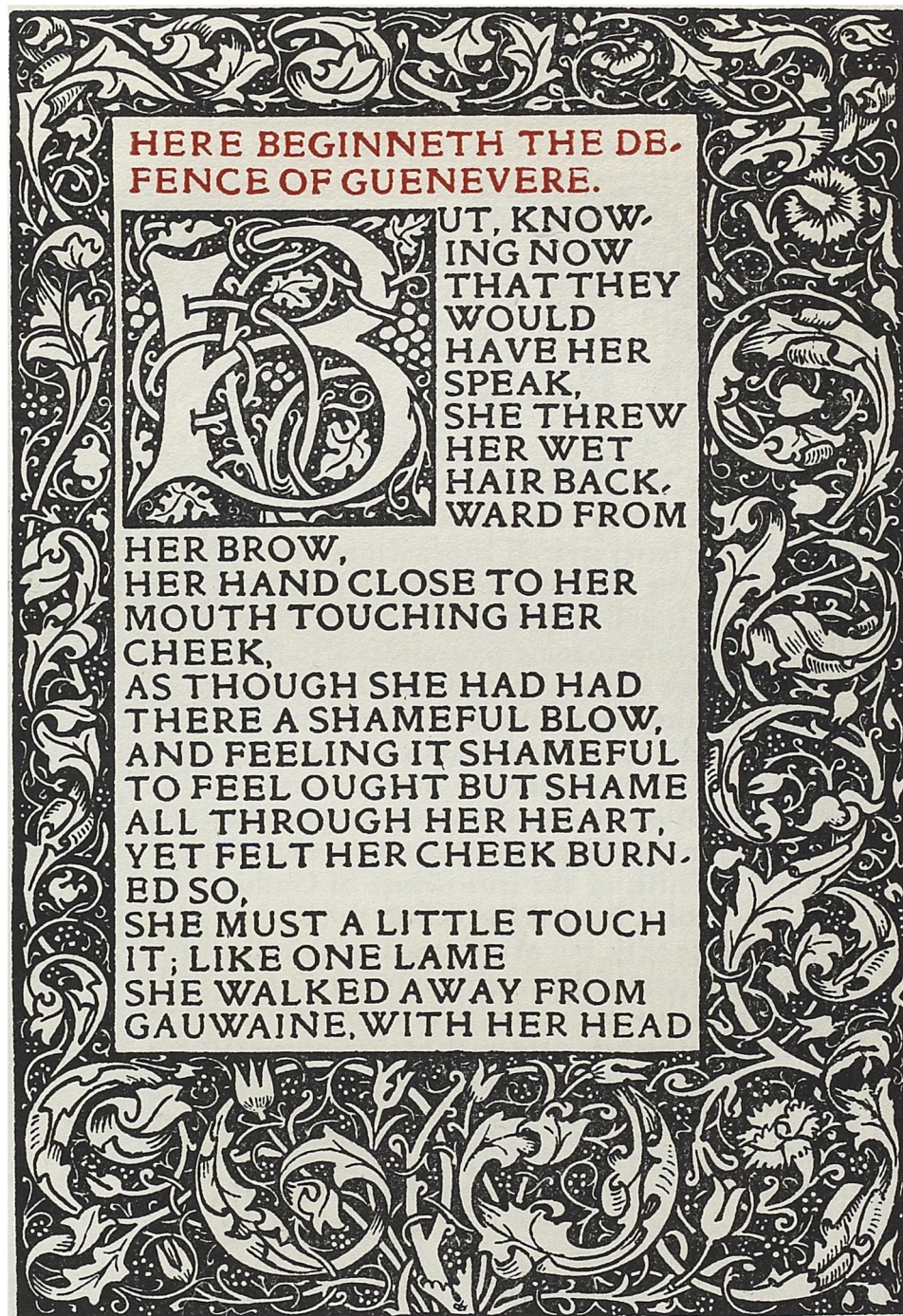
self pointed out that in designing this new "face" he has been guided by fifteenth century Venetian examples and particularly by that of Nicholas Jenson himself. A single comparison of the work of the two men will show the similarity as well as the difference which exists between their types, and also that the superiority of the newer has been obtained by no departure from the principles of the earlier, but rather by closely following the old lines, though in no servile spirit, and improving upon the manner of their execution wherever possible. That the genius of the most gifted designer of our day has found so little to change is an added testimony to the paramount excellence of the masterpieces which have for so long stood the test of time. Again, passing from the form of the letters to their size and proportion, it is to be noted that, while larger than those used in this magazine, they are so cut as to obviate all necessity for adding "leads" between the lines, thus securing great economy of space. In illustration of this latter point it may be noted that the ordinary edition of *The Defence of Guenevere*, though printed in a much smaller type than the new Kelmscott edition, occupies nearly seventy more pages. The "practical" value of this feature in saving the eyesight is by no means to be despised.

Closely connected with the types are the beautiful ornamental initials and borders with which these books are enriched. The earliest printers issued their books without any of these ornaments, leaving in their stead blank spaces of the requisite size to be afterwards filled in by professional illuminators, and many exquisite examples of this class of work are in existence, two particularly beautiful specimens from the press of Jenson having been shown at the recent Grolier Club Exhibition (Cat. Nos. 125 and 134). Though attempts were early made to substitute floriated or foliated wood-cut designs in place of these painted ornaments, little was accomplished till the time of Erhard Ratdolt, Bernard Pictor, and Peter Loslein, who printed together at Venice from 1476 to 1478, and of whose work in this direction an example is given on page 55. Comparison of this work with Mr. Morris' designs on pages 61 and 62 will show how to the *finesse* of the Italian work, which here again seems to have served as his model, he has added a certain Gothic sturdiness and savageness of character, akin to the hardy spirit which breathes through all the utterances of his Northern Muse: a character which makes every design unmistakably his own.

Beside the many forms which each letter assumes in this series of initials, we note a continuous change of "make-up"



From *The Nature of Gothic*, by John Ruskin, KELMSCOTT PRESS, 1892.



From *The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems*, by William Morris,
KELMSCOTT PRESS, April, 1892.

from one book to another, a progression and variation in the minor features of side-notes, rubrication, ornamental borders, wood-cut illustrations, and binding, so that the series of books, while remaining united in general form and appearance, yet presents that continual change of detail which is the sign of healthy life. And in the two books which are to be issued, each in three volumes, during the coming winter, Caxton's *Golden Legend* and *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*, we are promised a further development of the decorative features beside, in the latter, a wholly new fount of type, this time a black letter designed by Mr. Morris with special view to rendering it easily readable to modern eyes without sacrificing its peculiar characteristics.

The paper on which these books are printed is quite as good as any that has ever been made since the substance was invented; and from the vellum bindings, with their curious leathern or hand-woven silken strings, down to the smallest of those little but important details which go to make up the perfect book, the same loving care is everywhere manifest, so that they may well be described, as they have been by one enthusiastic and competent judge, as, within the realm of the printer's art, "the crowning glory of the nineteenth century."

FRANCIS WATTS LEE.

